

## God's Big Picture 5: II Chronicles to Malachi The Prophesied Kingdom

### Introduction

On 2 April 2009 history of the 'wrong' variety was made in the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island, USA, when a priest was defrocked for 'abandoning the Communion of The Episcopal Church'. At a time when the Episcopal Church in the USA has become known for tolerating all kinds of departures from historic orthodoxy this course of action was seen as something of a surprise. What had the Rev Ann Holmes Redding done to merit this ultimate sanction? As far back as 2006 this lady had been attending an inter-faith gathering where she had been 'moved by Muslim prayers'. As a result of that experience she had become a practising Muslim. However, she claimed that this in no way contradicted her beliefs as a follower of Jesus Christ and that she could be '100 per cent' Muslim and Christian. This was a step too far for the Bishop, GERALYN WOLF, who promptly suspended her from carrying out 'all her priestly duties while giving her the opportunity to reflect on the Christian faith and her beliefs.' Ann Redding had until April 09 to reconsider her ways, but as a result of her insistence that she could be both a Muslim and Christian the bishop had no choice but to depose her from her office. [[www.christianpost.com/church/Denomination/2009/04/Episcopal-priest-defrocked-aft](http://www.christianpost.com/church/Denomination/2009/04/Episcopal-priest-defrocked-aft) seen 3.4.09] Many people in Israel during the pre-exilic period would have sympathised with this Episcopal priest. They felt that it was okay both to worship Yahweh the God of Israel and the Canaanite god Baal. Time and again the prophets of the Lord would protest against this idolatry and unacceptable practise – the most famous example was Elijah's famous message on Mount Carmel, during the time of the reign of Ahab, King of the northern kingdom of Israel, recorded in I Kings 18:16-45. His famous challenge: Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.<sup>22</sup> Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets."<sup>23</sup> Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.<sup>24</sup> Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good." Time and again this prophetic call to the people to return to their God was made by different prophets using their own distinctive personalities to express the same message in different social and political contexts.

### 1. The Precursors of the Prophets From Moses and Aaron to Elijah and Elisha

Moses was undoubtedly the first prophets of Israel even if he was known more for his inspiring leadership of the nation for over forty years. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19 we read:<sup>15</sup> *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*<sup>16</sup> *For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."*<sup>17</sup> *The Lord said to me: "What they say is good.*<sup>18</sup> *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.*<sup>19</sup> *If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.* Peter, in Acts 3:18-23, refers back to this passage and declares that Jesus is the One being spoken of by Moses. God had a unique relationship with Moses as Numbers 12:6-8a: "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams."<sup>7</sup> But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in

all My house.<sup>8</sup> *With him I speak face to face* [Hebrew ‘mouth to mouth’ ie by an audible voice], *clearly and not in riddles*; God revealed His purposes to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3) and used him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. It was through Moses that God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel at Mount Sinai which led to the formation of the nation of Israel with its laws and principles for the society which would be formed once they entered the Promised Land. All the prophets after Moses hold up the Law of God like a mirror against which to judge the conduct of the people of Israel. They plead with the people to be faithful to God’s covenant and equally call them to repentance and restoration when they have gone astray. The covenant promises are set on a conditional basis with blessings for obedience and cursing and judgement for disobedience. This is set out most plainly in Deuteronomy 28 which begins with the blessings, for example 28:1-6: *If you **fully obey the Lord your God** and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.*<sup>2</sup> *All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:*<sup>3</sup> *You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.*<sup>4</sup> *The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.*<sup>5</sup> *Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.*<sup>6</sup> *You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.* If they failed to honour God’s commands then the curses (punishments) would follow (Deuteronomy 28:15-20). Deuteronomy 30:1-10 covers a future possibility of serious sin by the nation resulting in exile from the land. Did that mean the covenant was null and void?<sup>1</sup> *When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart **wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations,***<sup>2</sup> *and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today,*<sup>3</sup> *then **the Lord your God will restore your fortunes** and have compassion on you and **gather you again from all the nations** where He scattered you.*<sup>4</sup> *Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back.*<sup>5</sup> *He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.*<sup>6</sup> ***The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.***<sup>7</sup> *The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you.*<sup>8</sup> *You will again obey the Lord and follow all His commands I am giving you today.*<sup>9</sup> *Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as He delighted in your fathers,*<sup>10</sup> *if you obey the Lord your God and keep His commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* The blessings are conditional, but if the nation honours God the promises are assured.

In future generations there were prophets of the Lord; some like Samuel were very prominent in the nation and large sections of I Samuel covers incidents in his life and ministry. Others such as Nathan, King David’s personal pastor, appear less frequently, but on significant occasions. In his case to proclaim the prophecy that declared the kingdom to David’s descendants in perpetuity (II Samuel 7) and the rebuke when David sinned with Bathsheba (II Samuel 12). In the courts of the Kings of Israel and Judah specific prophets were invited to speak to the ruler and his government leaders at critical points in the nation’s history. Men like Ahijah (I Kings 11) and Micaiah (I Kings 22) of whom we know very little provided

incredibly accurate revelation of future events and wisdom about current situations. Elijah (I Kings 17-2 Kings 2) and Elisha (I Kings 19-II Kings 13) are the most prominent of these itinerant speaking prophets whose messages were rarely written down, but who had a huge influence in the nation during some very difficult years. It is difficult to categorise all the individuals labelled as prophets in the Old Testament yet Peter in II Peter 1:21 gives a good description of what they were doing in God's name: *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

## **2. The Pre-Exilic Prophets**

### **Chronology of the Prophets before the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722/1BC**

<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Approximate dates</b>	<b>Kings of Israel</b>	<b>Kings of Judah</b>
Obadiah	845BC	Joram	Jehoram
Joel	835BC	Jehu	Joash
Jonah	782BC	Jeroboam II (Assyrian King Shalmaneser IV)	Amaziah and Uzziah
Hosea	760-720BC	Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah
Amos	760BC	Jeroboam II	Uzziah
Isaiah	739-685BC	Pekah, Hoshea	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh
Micah	737-690BC	Pekah, Hoshea	Jotham , Ahaz, Hezekiah

A new era of prophetic ministry developed with the prophets who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, to write down their messages, either by their own hand or using a scribe. What do we know about these writing prophets? **Obadiah**, the earliest of them, is possibly the most obscure. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah. The one message that has survived was directed at the neighbouring Edomite people around 845BC. **Joel** also lived in or near Jerusalem and delivered his message around 835BC. It was a call to the nation to repent of their sins with the promise of blessings from God in the future for Jews that honoured God with a restoration of the kingdom centred on Jerusalem. **Jonah** came from Gath-hepher (today a town called El Meshed, several miles north of Nazareth. He was probably one of the leaders of the schools of the prophets in the later years of Elisha. His remarkable prophecy about the success of the military campaigns of Jeroboam II, the greatest ruler of the northern

kingdom, in terms of the success of his reign and its length (but not from a spiritual point of view!), dates his ministry from that era. The book of Jonah (written around 782BC) was a passionate attack on a form of Israelite nationalism that despised people of other ethnic backgrounds and showed no interest in sharing the good news of the Gospel with them. It revealed the missionary heart of God for Gentiles as well as Jews. **Hosea**, based in the northern kingdom of Israel proclaimed God's Word for around forty years from 760-720BC. His powerful and painful messages that described Israel's unfaithfulness to God were illustrated by the example of his own marital struggles. Despite the serial unfaithfulness of his wife, he persevered in loving her and declared that God would restore successfully his wayward people to fellowship with Him. **Amos** was a farm worker (a shepherd) from Tekoa, six miles south of Bethlehem. His blunt messages in Bethel, the home of the spiritual leaders of the Northern kingdom Israel, in 760BC, shocked the religious establishment who arranged for him to be expelled from Israel and sent back to Judah (Amos 7:10-13). The ostentatious display of wealth by the privileged few alongside the suffering of the many desperately poor provoked his blunt denunciation of this injustice. God's judgement would fall on Israel, but a people honouring to God in a future generation would come back to reclaim the land. **Isaiah** (739-685) and **Micah** (737-690) were based in Jerusalem, capital city of the southern kingdom of Judea. Isaiah was related to the royal family in Judah and lived his life in or around the royal court. His book, constantly attacked by liberal theologians and wrongly attributed to a number of unknown authors, contains a number of recurring themes such as his constant references to God as 'the holy one of Israel'; in addition his emphasis on 'Emmanuel' –God with us –pointing to God's closeness with His people of that day and pointing forward to the coming Messiah, was a wonderful encouragement to the nation that passed through some traumatic years, especially from the armies of the Assyrian empire (see Isaiah 38-39). Micah, Isaiah's contemporary, came from the village of Moresheth, near the Philistine town of Gath. His message was one of judgement to both kingdoms, but the ultimate vindication of God's faithful people.

Although each message was characterised by the social and cultural context in which they were proclaimed, there were a number of consistent themes running through many of their proclamations. The standard against which people were judged was of course the Ten Commandments and their various applications to the Jewish people. Some of these themes include: (a) **Transgression of God's Law** Amos 1-2, for example uses this theme as the basis for his message supremely to Israel about her wickedness: *This is what the Lord says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back (My wrath). They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 2:6). You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth.<sup>11</sup> You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.<sup>12</sup> For I know how many are your offences and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Listen to these words of Hosea: Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.<sup>2</sup> There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.<sup>3</sup> Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of*

*the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying* (Hosea 4:1-3). These words were spoken to Israel whom God held accountable to keep His moral law. He sees what we do. The law of the land may be impotent to punish the wicked at times, but God will ensure justice is served either in this life or the one to come. (b) **Judgement for Violating God's Law** Despite the reforms of godly kings like Josiah (II Kings 23) the decline and judgement of both Israel and Judah becomes inevitable. This judgement can be **an immediate and local punishment**: Amos 4:6-9, for example: *I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.*<sup>7</sup> *"I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up.*<sup>8</sup> *People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.*<sup>9</sup> *"Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.* In Judah, the fate of exiled Israel was held up as a warning time and again with little impact: Isaiah 10:10-11: <sup>10</sup>*As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria-*<sup>11</sup> *shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols?"* Judgement prophesied can also be described in **universal or cosmic form**: Jeremiah 4:23-28, for example: *I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone.*<sup>24</sup> *I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying.*<sup>25</sup> *I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away.*<sup>26</sup> *I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger.*<sup>27</sup> *This is what the Lord says: "The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely.*<sup>28</sup> *Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back."* Isaiah 24:1-3 is another example: *See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; He will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants-*<sup>2</sup> *it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor.*<sup>3</sup> *The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The Lord has spoken this word.* (c) **Salvation for returning to God's Law** Amos 9:11-15: *"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be,*<sup>12</sup> *so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, "* declares the Lord, *who will do these things.*<sup>13</sup> *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.*<sup>14</sup> *I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.*<sup>15</sup> *I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.* Or Hosea 14:4-7, for example: *"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them.*<sup>5</sup> *I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots;*<sup>6</sup> *his young shoots will grow. His splendour will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.*<sup>7</sup> *Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.* (d) **Messages to other Nations** (Amos 1-2; Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 46-51; Ezekiel 25-32). It is more than likely that these messages were delivered to the Jewish people rather than directly to citizens of the country being spoken about. There are of course exceptions, especially the Book of Jonah, a message to the people of Ninevah and possibly the Book of Obadiah to the

Edomites. The nations were judged in part by their treatment of God’s people, but were also used by God to punish His people when they had gone astray. The point of these addresses was that God is concerned with the conduct of people in every country and expects certain standards of behaviour. Those people who have not had a clear opportunity to hear the message of the gospel will be called to account in the light of their conscience and the knowledge they have of right and wrong. This principle is explained more clearly by Paul in Romans chapters One and Two in the New Testament. We must never be mistaken in thinking that God is only interested in what we do on Sunday or in the ‘spiritual’ areas of our lives. The Bible has a holistic view of life and God wants the principles He has given us to inform every area of our lives at home, in the workplace and in our social lives every bit as much as in church-related activities.

**Chronology of the Prophets in Judah prior to its fall in 587/6BC**

<b><u>Prophet</u></b>	<b><u>Approximate dates</u></b>	<b><u>Kings of Judah</u></b>	<b><u>Other Rulers</u></b>
Nahum	650	Manasseh	Assyria: Ashurbanipal
Zephaniah	640	Josiah	
Jeremiah	627-580	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah [governor of occupied territory Gedaliah]	Babylon: Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar
Habakkuk	609	Jehoiakim	Babylon: Nabopolassar

**Nahum**, of whom almost nothing is known, came from Elkosh in Galilee. The writing of his book appears to have taken place after the capture of the prominent northern Egyptian city of No-Amon by the Assyrian army in 665 or 664BC. The book is directed to the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh. Its people, a century earlier, had repented of their sins following the preaching of Jonah, but now it was even more wicked and godless and their doom was sealed. In July 612 Nineveh fell to a combined Median and Babylonian army. God will not be mocked. **Zephaniah**, a member of the royal family, exercised his ministry during the reign of the godly king Josiah. Yet the nation’s heart was not in the reforms. They did not share the faith of their king. Judgement for their sins and those of neighbouring Gentiles was inevitable. Yet following their repentance days of future joy would be experienced in Jerusalem (Zephaniah 3:14-20). **Jeremiah**, known as the weeping prophet had a lengthy ministry from 627 to 580BC in Judah; his messages warning the people to flee from the wrath to come were laughed at or ignored –except by the Babylonian government! He saw his

beloved city, Jerusalem, in ruins with most of its population dead or exiled to Babylon. Accompanied by his faithful scribe Baruch he kept faithful to his calling, yet at the same time pleading with God (for example, Jeremiah 20:7-18) to be allowed to resign and do some other form of work. The book of **Lamentations**, written as he sat heartbroken in the ruins of that city, includes some of the most wonderful verses in Scripture on the faithfulness of God (Lamentations 3:19-26). **Habakkuk's** message, written around 609 or 608 BC, appears to have been a private reflection on the providence of God. The Middle East was in shock at the fall of the apparently invincible Assyrian Empire a few years earlier. Would the new superpower, Babylon, be the answer to everyone's hopes and aspirations? No! says the prophet, our only hope is to place our faith in God, in the good times as well as the bad.

### **3.The Exilic and Post Exilic Prophets** Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai Zechariah Malachi

The last book in the Hebrew language Bible of Jesus' day was II Chronicles (because the 39 books were arranged in a different order). The closing words of the book explain the significance of the exile and the reason for their return: <sup>20</sup> *He [Nebuchadnezzar] carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.* <sup>21</sup> *The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.* <sup>22</sup> *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:* <sup>23</sup> *"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:" "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up."* "The exile was a traumatic event in the life of the Israelite community—only the Shoah (Hebrew word for destruction -holocaust a Greek word) in the twentieth century bears comparison in its impact on the Jewish people around the known world. Ezekiel and Daniel were two of the inspirational Jewish leaders amongst the exiles. **Daniel** who lived in Babylon from 605-530BC was trained with other Jewish school-boys, who had been abducted in early youth from their land, as civil servants for the Babylonian government. Along with his three friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah he covenanted to remain faithful to the Lord whatever the cost. All four of them, either in a fiery furnace or a lion's den, were put to the ultimate test and they passed with flying colours. He became the equivalent of prime minister in several successive governments, including when there was a change of country ruling the empire – an extraordinary development! This book, written in the late sixth or early fifth century BC is an extraordinary testimony to the faithfulness of God to these teenagers and provides glimpses of not only of the sustaining grace of God in adversity in Babylon, but also glimpses of the end times in the later stages of the book. Daniel 12:2-3 speaks about the end of the world: *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.* <sup>3</sup> *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.* **Ezekiel's** ministry as a pastor and prophet to the Jewish slaves in the chain gangs building the canals and public works projects in Babylon lasted from approximately 593 to 570BC. The key message of his large book is the following one repeated around seventy times by Ezekiel: *Then they will know that I am the Lord* (for example, Ezekiel 6:14). After a description of his unusual call, his message addresses God's judgement on the nation of Israel; then the destinies of other nations; followed by his vision of the final temple, people and city in a restored Jerusalem. There were three prophets that proclaimed God's message

after the exile. **Haggai** (520) and **Zechariah** (520-485?) provided a challenge to the discouraged exiles to restart building the Jerusalem Temple, putting God first rather than their own personal ambitions. (The books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** describe how the city walls were restored and rebuild in the following generation by a Jewish governor who had a real passion for honouring God. The book of **Esther** in Persia (Iran) during the reign of Ahasuerus (485-465BC reveals the providential care of God that prevented an attempted holocaust by a wicked official Haman, whose Amalekite ancestors had attacked the Israelites when they came out of Egypt with Moses –see Exodus 17:8-16) **Malachi** wrote the final book of the Old Testament after Nehemiah’s second brief term as governor, no earlier than 433BC when spiritual zeal was flagging. His work is a strong appeal to put God first in the lives of his hearers and readers –a call applicable in each and every generation.

**Chronology of the Prophets during and after the Exile to Babylon**

<b><u>Prophet</u></b>	<b><u>Approximate dates</u></b>	<b><u>Kings /Governors of Judah</u></b>	<b><u>Foreign Kings</u></b>
Daniel	605-530BC	Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar’ Neriglissar, Labashimarduk, Evil-Merodach, Nabonidas  Medo-Persian:  Cyrus, possibly Cambyses
Ezekiel	593-570BC	Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar
Haggai	520BC	Governor: Zerubbabel	Medo-Persian: Darius I
Zechariah	520-485? BC	Governor: Zerubbabel	Medo-Persian:  Darius I
Malachi	433BC or slightly later	Governor : Nehemiah?	Medo-Persian  Darius II

**4. The Key Themes in Prophecy**

All that God has revealed about His kingdom through Israel’s history remains valid. It is modified by the prophets under God to reveal a new understanding of the final kingdom that

includes a new heaven and earth that will be perfect, permanent and honouring to God. The exile was a necessary interruption to God's kingdom plans. The exodus events from Egypt and later from Babylon were a picture of God at work releasing His people from bondage into the heritage He had prepared for them. The Sinai covenant was the binding agreement between God and His people and in its principles as the Moral Law (Ten Commandments) it is of permanent validity. God was determined to bring His people back to the land which He had promised to them. God's rule in this earthly kingdom was centred on the Temple, the Davidic king and the city of Jerusalem. What kind of covenant was this? Genesis 17:7: *I will establish my covenant as an **everlasting** covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.* You can sense the feeling in these words from God to Israel in Isaiah 54:7-8: *"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. <sup>8</sup>In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.* Or as Micah declares: *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. <sup>19</sup> You will again have compassion on us; You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. <sup>20</sup> You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as You pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago [Micah 7:18-20]* Judgement and exile would not be final, the covenant love of God would endure forever proclaimed Jeremiah in the ruins of Jerusalem: *"This is what the Lord says: 'You say about this place, "It is a desolate waste, without men or animals." Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither men nor animals, there will be heard once more <sup>11</sup> the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, "Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; His love endures forever." **For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,' says the Lord [Jeremiah 33:10-11].** The history of the nation has been repeated. There was: 1. **A New Captivity** in Babylon, similar to the former one from Egypt; There will be 2. **A New Exodus** from Babylon like there was from Egypt under Moses. Notice these words from Isaiah 43:15-21: <sup>15</sup> *I am the Lord, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King.* <sup>16</sup> *This is what the Lord says— He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, <sup>17</sup> who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: <sup>18</sup> "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. <sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. <sup>20</sup> The wild animals honour me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, <sup>21</sup> **the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.*** 3. **A New Covenant** which incorporates the renewal of several covenants with Noah (Isaiah 54:8-10); with Abraham (Isaiah 49:5-9); with Moses and David (Jeremiah 33:19-26); but yet is a new personal relationship with God between the individual and their redeemer, albeit within the covenant community of the people of God (Jeremiah 31:31-34). 4. **A New Nation** whose hearts are changed and cleansed (Ezekiel 36:24-28); the nation will be re-established in the Promised Land (for example, Isaiah 60:3-14); the new temple will be glorious (Ezekiel 40-47); worshippers will be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6); in accordance with the covenant with David (II Samuel 7) the new 'David' will reign as the shepherd of His people (Jeremiah 23:5-8; Ezekiel 34:11-17);*

and the nations will come to share in the blessings promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-2: *In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.* <sup>2</sup> *Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Zechariah 8:20-23: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come,* <sup>21</sup> *and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.'* <sup>22</sup> *And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat Him."* <sup>23</sup> *This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'* " 5. **A New Creation** the recreation of the nation was seen as part of the continuing purposes of God begun in Eden. Isaiah describes the redemption of Israel in the framework of the new creation, new heaven and a new earth. Isaiah 65:17-21:<sup>17</sup>***Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.*** <sup>18</sup> *But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.* <sup>19</sup> *I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.* <sup>20</sup> *"Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.* <sup>21</sup> *They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. In this glorious future the harmony of nature will be restored (Isaiah 11:1-9). [See G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, pp.99-102 on the above five points] Yet life after the exile was far from this glorious vision; a greater son of David than Zerubbabel would reign supreme. Yet there was to be four hundred years of prophetic silence in the land until as Isaiah 40:3 predicts regarding John the Baptist: *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Amen**